

Similitudes and differences of the Indian and Indochinese avifaunas¹

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The two great tropical peninsulas of Asia form two faunal subregions of the Oriental Region. Both are sharply separated from the temperate areas to the north, for the greatest part, by the highest mountains in the world and, as can be expected, their floras and faunas are closely related. But India is connected in the west with Asia Minor and Arabia, two arid countries, while Indochina is gradually linked to China in the north-east, and to Malaya (and in the recent past to Borneo and Sumatra) in the south, respectively moist-temperate and equatorial in climate. Also it has many more local microregions, due to broken-up chains and plateaux, and to large rivers, with specialized and often endemic populations.

The western part of the Indochinese Peninsula of course resembles India more nearly, and, as it extends farther north, towards the Himalayas, the faunal changes are quite gradual in a number of cases.

The lower and more open parts of the whole Oriental Region, and also the cultivated lands, are often inhabited by the same species, represented by local but usually fairly similar subspecies. It is in the higher, forested districts that the avifauna becomes more distinct, with many striking forms usually confined to relatively small territories which constitute special habitats.

To illustrate more strikingly the differences between the two subregions, it is preferable to consider, on the one hand, continental India, without Ceylon or other islands, and on the other, the eastern parts of Indochina, made up of Vietnam (Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China), Cambodia and Laos, which used to form French Indochina. Being situated at the extreme south-east of Asia, they possess a much richer and more specialized fauna than the western parts, Thailand and Burma. As also I have spent some twenty years exploring that country and studying its bird life, I am more familiar with it.

It is not my intention, in a short note, to make a general survey of the similitudes and differences of these avifaunas as a whole ; it would fill volumes ! But I shall venture to show those existing in three families which are particularly well represented in the Oriental Region, better perhaps than in any other one : Phasianidae, Picidae and Corvidae. It will offer a good sample of the general picture.

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One has above all to remember that India is a much larger area than eastern Indochina, so that the actual numbers of species found in each of the two do not represent its real comparative wealth. The truth is that, for areas of comparable size, Indochina is actually the richer of the two.

PHASIANIDAE

North-west India and the Himalayas have a large population of game birds akin to the palearctic ones, none of which occur in Indochina. Among the Phasianidae popularly known as 'partridges' without long tails or bright colours, the following genera are represented in India, but not in Indochina: *Lerwa*, *Ammoperdix*, *Tetraogallus*, *Tetraophasis*, *Alectoris*, *Perdix*, *Ophryisia*. All are of palearctic or Himalayan origin.

Two other genera, confined to the warmer parts of India, are not represented in Indochina: *Perdicola*, *Galloperdix*. There are five species of *Francolinus* in India: *francoisii*, *pictus*, *pondicerianus*, *gularis*, *pintadeanus*. The last named is the only species to reach Indochina and to extend to southern China. It can be noted here that the centre of distribution of *Francolinus* is Africa. Of the three species of Indian quails, *Coturnix coromandelica* is endemic, while the migrant *C. coturnix* and the resident *C. chinensis* are also found in Indochina.

Bambusicola fytchii lives in the north of both subregions, and there are only four species of the forest partridges (*Arborophila*) in India: *atrogularis*, *mandellii*, *torquata* and *rufogularis*. The last two, as slightly different subspecies, also inhabit Indochina, where four more species are found: *brunneopectus*, *cambodiana*, *davidi*, *chloropus*.

Among the genera accepted as 'pheasants', *Ithaginis*, *Lophophorus*, *Pucrasia*, *Crossoptilon*, *Catreus*, *Syrnaticus* do not enter French Indochina although some reach northern Burma. *Tragopan* has four species in India: *melanocephalus*, *satyra*, *blythii* and *temminckii*, the last of which only is found also in north-west Tonkin, at high altitudes. The palearctic *Phasianus colchicus*, however, is found in northern Indochina, close to China.

India has but one polymorphic species of *Lophura* (*leucomelana*) while eastern Indochina is the home of four: *nycthemera* (with many subspecies), *imperialis*, *edwardsi* and *diardi*. It also possesses the Crested Argus (*Rheinartia*) and two Peacock Pheasants: *Polyplectron germaini* and *P. bicalcaratum*, the latter also found in northern India.

The Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) is common to both subregions, but *G. sonneratii* is peculiar to western and southern India.

The Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) of India is replaced in Indochina by the Green (*P. muticus*).

PICIDAE

Woodpeckers are particularly numerous in the Oriental Region ; there are no fewer than 32 species in India and 2 in Indochina, many of them inhabiting the same territory, where they are common.

India has in the north-west representatives of one palearctic species, *Picoides tridactylus*, while another one, *Picoides major*, is found in both peninsulas. Another *Picus (squamatus)* and four *Picoides (himalayensis, assimilis, auriceps and nanus)* ; the last is merged by some authors into *P. canicapillus* of northern Indochina) are proper to India, as are *Dinopium benghalense*, *D. shorii* and *Chrysocolaptes festivus*.

Indochina has of its own *Picus vittatus*, *P. erythrogygius*, *P. rabieri* and *Meiglyptes jugularis*.

The following are common to both subregions, with sometimes very well characterized subspecies : *Jynx torquilla*, *Picumnus innominatus*, *Sasia ochracea*, *Micropternus brachyurus*, *Picus canus*, *P. myrmecophoneus*, *P. flavinucha*, *P. chlorolophus*, *Dinopium javanense*, *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*, *Gecinulus grantia*, *Mulleripicus pulverulentus*, *Dryocopus javensis*, *Hypopicus hyperythrus*, *Picoides darjellensis*, *P. cathpharius*, *P. macei*, *P. atratus*, *P. mahrattensis*, *P. canicapillus*, *Hemicircus canente*, *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*.

CORVIDAE

Crows, Magpies and Jays are represented by many species in the Oriental Region, much more numerous there than in any other part of the world : 22 in India and 15 in eastern Indochina. Only 10 are common to both.

A number of palearctic and Himalayan species are found only in India : *Corvus corax*, *C. frugilegus*, *C. monedula*, *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, *P. graculus*, *Podoces humilis*, *Nucifraga caryocatactes*, while a few only extend farther east : *Corvus corone*, *Pica pica*, *Garrulus glandarius*. Indochina alone has *Corvus torquatus* (also found in China).

Of the tropical forms, India alone possesses three : *Corvus splendens*, *Dendrocitta leucogastra*, *Garrulus lanceolatus*, while Indochina is inhabited by four birds, two extending to China or Malaysia : *Cissa whiteheadi* (also found in Hainan), *C. thalassina*, *Crypsirina temia*, *C. temnura* (also in Hainan).

The following species are common to both subregions : *Corvus macro-rhynchos*, *Cissa erythrorhyncha*, *C. flavirostris*, *C. chinensis*, *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, *D. formosae*, *D. frontalis*.

As is shown by the above examples, the repartition of species varies somewhat in the Oriental Region, their distribution being affected by the greater or lesser abilities to travel of the birds of different families

But the general pattern is fairly constant. It is clear that the birds of both subregions are closely related.

When I started exploring Indochina in 1923, it was not always easy to identify specimens in the field, as there was no practical handbook at hand; only publications on particular areas, such as Tirant's *Les oiseaux de la Basse-Cochinchine*, and various reports by Oustalet. We often had to use books on Indian and Burmese birds such as those of Oates and Blanford, and later of Stuart Baker. They proved very useful. Much more is known at present on the birds of the Oriental Region. Among the ornithologists most responsible for such progress is Sálím Ali. I am delighted to dedicate to him this small contribution. As I write it, the memory of many happy days in India and in Indochina come back to me, and I cannot but congratulate myself for the luck I had in being able to explore and to study the incomparable fauna of Indochina when conditions there allowed researches to be carried out in safety and relative comfort. I only hope that such favourable conditions will before too long prevail in that marvellous country.